

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting

Here are some tips to help you conduct a successful virtual meeting.

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting: How to Prepare

"The first thing we do before deciding what technologies and software will be needed is to decide who the participating audience is and what information is being shared," says Drew Bowers, a research psychologist in the University of Dayton Research Institute's Human Factors Group. "We have found that it is best for presenters to either design their data or presentation according to the environment they will be presenting in, or to choose the best environment to represent the data they have." Bowers says, "You can't simply take a presentation you gave in front of a live audience at a conference and throw it up on a video monitor for a virtual audience and expect the same results, because you're limited, to a degree, in how you can interact with your virtual audience."

Dennis points out that when you schedule a meeting in a physical location, you can be more casual about the meeting's agenda and providing materials. You also have the advantage of getting attendees up to speed in the hallway, at the coffee machine, etc. However, a successful virtual meeting requires a lot more upfront preparation. Colaric recommends that virtual meetings be planned out well in advance. "Send the agenda ahead of time, create visuals to reinforce your message and forward them to everyone before the meeting, invite the members of each team who need to be involved," she says.

Also, make sure to send log-in information (access codes, URLs, and call-in numbers) at least a day in advance so that participants can test for any software downloads needed. You may also want to ask participants to log in at least 15 minutes prior to the start to test connectivity, suggests Laura Stack, author and president of The Productivity Pro, a time-management training firm. "Conduct roll call and verify that everything is working. Review the timeline. Give out a method to reach you offline should a panelist encounter problems, says Stack.

Note: If you are hosting a single presenter with a large audience tuning in, then it is a good idea to have a facilitator designated to assist the main presenter. The facilitator can support participants with technical issues as well as monitor any chat questions that come in. Having the presenter try to read chat questions slows down the flow of the presentation.

Dig Deeper: iMeet's New Videoconference Tool

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting: Technical Tools and Requirements

The beauty of online meeting technology is that even the most fledgling, bare bones operation, can use it. All that's required is an Internet connection, audio (from computer speakers, microphone, or via telephone), and a webcam (standalone or integrated with your monitor/laptop). Larger groups may also need a projection screen or large TV monitor.

When choosing a service think "small," says Susan Colaric, assistant vice president for Instructional Technology at Saint Leo University in Saint Leo, Florida. "The most effective web conferences are those that only use the technology that is needed. KIS—keep it simple— is the best way to have people focus on

your message and not the technology." Some online web products include [Adobe Acrobat Connect](#), [GoToMeeting](#), [Microsoft Office Live Meeting](#) and [WebEx](#).

Entrepreneurs also need to be mindful that not every video conferencing system will work together. Avoid the embarrassment of delays and technical glitches by testing the connectivity of all sites before the meeting. "Trying to use an analog video system at one end and a digital system on the other can cause a multitude of problems, and even digital-to-digital conferencing can be problematic if an older software program needs an upgrade before it can 'talk to' a newer program," says Bowers.

Dig Deeper: No Fly Zone: Virtual Meetings

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting: Stay Focused

Rick Maurer, author of *Beyond the Wall of Resistance* and *Why Don't You Want What I Want?* advises users to remove distractions. The advantage of virtual meetings is the ability to hold them almost anywhere—the disadvantage of virtual meetings is also the ability to hold them almost anywhere. Online meeting attendees can call or log in from the local coffeehouse, airport lounges, home offices, etc. To minimize background or "road noise" (you don't want your child, pet, or ringing phones to become the focus) you can opt to "mute all attendees and only take questions via the chat box," says Stack.

Maurer also advises against trying to squeeze multiple things into a single meeting. "Keep the focus on one or two topics. If you must cover more items, then give people time to stretch, take a bathroom break, or replenish their coffee. Keep each segment of the meeting short - no longer than 30 minutes."

Note: Striped shirts do not transmit well on camera nor does large, shiny jewelry. Both can be visually distracting. Try to keep your body movements to a minimum as excessive movement can actually degrade video quality.

Dig Deeper: Meeting on the Web: Which Tools to Use?

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting: Etiquette

"The key to a successful video conference or phone conference meeting is to remember that you are in a meeting," stresses Colaric. "Give your full attention to the participants as you would if you were in the same room. Don't be distracted by e-mail, Web surfing, or texting. Try not to eat or drink so that you can be prepared if questions are directed to you."

A good rule of thumb? Colaric says, "Always assume when you walk into the room that the microphones are already live to other locations! This helps prevent any extraneous pre-meeting conversation from being broadcast when you might not intend it to."

She also points out that video-conference meetings should actually move at a slightly slower pace than a typical meeting due to a two to three second delay for most systems to communicate. If you're leading the meeting, make sure there are sufficient pauses after asking a question. If you are a participant, bring attention to yourself before addressing the group by signaling with your hand or saying "question" or "comment" and then waiting a couple seconds before continuing."

Participants should also make eye contact by looking into the camera. It will make conversation among the participants more natural. The following is a quick cheat sheet on etiquette:

The 8 Do's of Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Do be courteous to other participants
- Do speak clearly
- Do keep body movements minimal
- Do move and gesture slowly and naturally
- Do maintain eye contact by looking into the camera
- Do dress appropriately
- Do make the session animated
- Do be yourself and have fun!

The 7 Don'ts of Video Conferencing Etiquette

- Don't make distracting sounds
- Don't shout
- Don't make distracting movements
- Don't interrupt other speakers
- Don't carry on side conversations
- Don't wear "noisy" jewelry
- Don't cover the microphone



● [VIEW SLIDESHOW](#)

MORE:

Source: St. Leo University Office of Information Technology

Note: If your doing business globally, check out sites such as executiveplanet.com and kissbowshakehands.com for resources on international business etiquette.

[Dig Deeper: The Case, and the Plan, for the Virtual Company](#)

5 Tips for Conducting a Virtual Meeting: Engaging Participants

Dennis says there's a tendency in virtual meetings to launch right into the task, which can negatively affect relationship building. She recommends breaking the ice by going around the "virtual" room and asking everyone to introduce themselves and share something about their weekend, or talk about something they're looking forward to, to add a social element to the proceedings. "Everything you can simulate from face to face encounters is good."

Stack says to encourage participants to submit their questions on the topic before the program begins. She also recommends other methods for keeping the audience engaged during the webinar, such as taking a poll or asking a question and asking for answers via chat.

Colaric suggests asking questions frequently both to engage remote participants and to keep a personal connection going. But, she stresses, be explicit in your questions. "Ask a specific person a specific question. Asking open-ended questions to a large remote audience will often result in "dead air" and then multiple people talking at once."

[Dig Deeper: How a Virtual Company Communicates](#)

